

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 581

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 2844

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF

SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES - PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

REFS: A) STATE 157990; B) OAKLEY-LOWMAN TELECON

1. THE BASIC DIFFICULTY IN THE IDEA OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INDOCHINESE REFUGEES REMAINS THE RELUCTANCE OF SOME, PARTICULARLY FRANCE, REFUGEE RECEIVING NATIONS TO GIVE WIDE PUBLICITY TO THEIR PROGRAMS. UNLESS THIS CAN BE OFFSET BY A SUBSTANTIAL LIKELIHOOD THAT SUCH A CONFERENCE WOULD, IN FACT, PRODUCE ADDITIONAL RESETTLEMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN OTHER COUNTRIES, THE IDEA COULD BE A COUNTER PRODUCTIVE ONE. ADDITIONALLY, SUCH A CONFERENCE WOULD BE LIKELY TO STRESS THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE ONGOING PROBLEM AND ITS PROBABLE CONTINUING NATURE. IF, AT THE SAME TIME, ADEQUATE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM SO DESCRIBED WERE NOT FOUND, THE EFFECT ON THE POLICIES OF COUNTRIES OF FIRST ASYLUM COULD BE EQUALLY COUNTER PRODUCTIVE.

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2. THUS, AT LEAST INITIALLY, ANY INITIATIVE IN THIS DIRECTION SHOULD PROBABLY BE KEPT QUITE LOW KEY. UNHCR REP/KUALA LUMPUR SAMPATKUMAR HAS CALLED REGIONAL CONFERENCE, SIMILAR TO THAT HELD IN JANUARY 1978, FOR JULY 3 IN KUALA LUMPUR. IN ADDITION TO THOSE REPRESENTATIVE INVITED TO THE JANUARY CONFERENCE SAMPATKUMAR IS INVITING REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE ASEAN NATIONS. WHILE THERE IS LITTLE TIME TO

TURN SUCH A CONFERENCE INTO ONE WITH BROADER AIMS, IT COULD BE QUITE HELPFUL IF THE UNHCR CHOSE TO SEND A SENIOR OFFICER FROM GENEVA TO ATTEND. THIS PARTICULARLY THE CASE SINCE NO SENIOR UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE HAS VISITED KUALA LUMPUR SINCE THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEE PROBLEM THERE BECAME A SERIOUS ONE. AN OBVIOUS POSSIBLE CANDIDATE TO ATTEND THE CONFERENCE WOULD BE THE NEWLY-NAMED DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER DALE DEHAAN.

3. LOWMAN INTENDS TO MAKE A SLIGHT ADJUSTMENT IN HIS SCHEDULE IN ORDER TO ATTEND THIS ONE DAY CONFERENCE. RECOMMEND THAT FRIEDMAN ALSO ADJUST HIS SCHEDULE TO ACCOMPANY LOWMAN TO CANBERRA AND THEN ATTEND THE JULY 3 CONFERENCE IN KUALA LUMPUR UNLESS HE IS BADLY NEEDED IN THE DEPARTMENT.

4. IN ATTEMPTING TO BUILD ON SAMPATKUMAR'S INITIATIVE IN CALLING A REGIONAL CONFERENCE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO AVOID CREATING THE IMPRESSION THAT MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE SOUGHT OR EXPECTED FROM SUCH A MEETING. AT A MINIMUM, WE COULD HOPE FOR CONTINUING IMPROVEMENTS IN THE COORDINATION OF CURRENTLY ONGOING PROGRAMS OF REFUGEE RECEIVING NATIONS. BEYOND THAT, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE GROUNDWORK MIGHT BE LAID FOR FURTHER JOINT EXPLORATION OF THIS PROBLEM AT THE ASEAN-US TALKS IN AUGUST AND THE UNHCR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING IN THE FALL. ANOTHER REASON FOR KEEPING THE KUALA CONFIDENTIAL

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LUMPUR MEETING LOW KEY IS THE FACT THAT THE MALAYSIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD ON JULY 8 AND LOCAL SENSITIVITIES ON REFUGEE MATTERS APPEAR TO BE QUITE KEEN. EMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR MAY WISH TO COMMENT FURTHER ON THIS ASPECT OF THIS PROPOSAL.
INGRAHAM

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